

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL  
SECURITY, EMERGING THREATS,  
AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS  
*Hearing on The 9/11 Commission Recommendations on Public Diplomacy:  
Defending Ideals and Defining the Message*

By  
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The unparalleled focus and serious recommendations this Subcommittee brings to Public Diplomacy can materially change our relationship with the Arab and Muslim people. These are people from whom we've been isolated; and, people to whom we must defend our values and beliefs in order to ensure the safety of our own people. Thank you for inviting me to participate. I consider it an honor.

The recommendations in every case should be implemented. But, I will suggest you separate certain issues, require more innovation, and consider a new structure. The thoughtful conclusions preceding those recommendations you lay out, after only a few intense months, are very much where the Public Diplomacy team at State came out in some two long years of evaluation after September 11, 2001.

What's the message, you ask? We had emerged in those two years with only two primary objectives: Empower the women and Educate the young. There is no question in my mind the women of these Muslim/Arab countries will be the agents for change as they fight for certain individual freedoms, but more importantly for opportunities for their children.

You painted, thankfully, a much larger canvas. "Defend ideals;" "Encourage reform, freedom, democracy and opportunity;" "Act aggressively to define Americans;" "Moral Leadership;" "Generous and Caring to our neighbors;" "Encourage the moderates;" and the one that resonates with all we know about positive communication, "Arab and Muslim friends can agree on respect for human dignity and (the importance of) economic opportunity."

These are elegant, difficult and necessarily long term tasks. This work requires in-depth understanding of the people in these countries, so that the messages can be heard. To confront intangible issues such as tolerance, the concept of freedom to a Muslim, to find a way to be the messenger without apology, are all jobs that require a set of skills and a degree of determination, not presently available or organized to be effective at this time. Let me explain.

There are in the State Department exceptionally qualified people who create a vital dialog with key governments around the world. This traditional diplomacy is supported by a talented public affairs team in State and at the embassies, who deliver swiftly, accurately and in over 30 languages, the messages relating to our foreign policies. They interpret and define to their government counterparts and local leaders the meaning and context of such policies. The skill, talent and loyalty of those who practice this essential role of diplomacy are often unsung heroes and largely unknown to the outside world. It is work, by its very nature, that is discreet, slow moving and secretive.

Public Diplomacy is a whole different skill set with completely different objectives, having as its intended audience many diverse groups of people in the country, as well as its government or leaders. This work of Public Diplomacy has as its charter to create mutual understanding country-to-country, people-to-people. The capacity to do the work of public diplomacy, today, is severely fragmented by different and competing units with no central leadership; by not having the right people who know how to develop modern communication content and delivery; and, by not being able to foster and fund a long term diplomacy effort of messages and programs.

Because public diplomacy is just that -- public -- with the goal of engaging many diverse audiences, it is quite unlike traditional diplomacy. Further, the messages and programs require skills in communications designed to influence as well as inform. Such tasks are not well placed in the State Department, whose main focus has to be more traditional diplomacy, though public diplomacy has to be coordinated with the work of our embassies. The goal is mutual understanding; bridges based on a common ground of universal values which will be longer lived than even the most urgent foreign policy. This can be a source of frustration, even controversy to those in the government and the press who believe that foreign policy must take the forefront in every communication.

The BBG and its new media channels have a somewhat more restricted charter than public diplomacy has, but critically important. They communicate the truth of

our foreign policies and help to interpret them to a hostile and indifferent audience. We can do a better job of putting policy messages in context in all forms of communication. The reach of the BBG's new initiatives to a much broader audience, because it is not filtered, is a vital foundation for an honest dialog. Much of the media from the BBG and its content, however, does not often address the larger canvas you've recommended.

Strategically, we must start with those areas of agreement we do have -- people-to-people, not necessarily government-to-government. It was partly sensitivity to the Government of Egypt that has kept the stunning story of our aid to that country the world's best kept secret. Because there is widespread and deliberate distortion of the values believed to be held by the people of the United States, it is essential we deliver a truer picture, to the Muslim and Arab world. At the moment, the Moderates cannot defend against the demonization of our society -- successfully summarized by our enemies as decadent and faithless -- and anti-Muslim.

But, being better and more truthfully understood is not nearly enough though it is a fundamental starting point. We have to clearly offer to others the dignity of the individual starting with personal freedom and the rule of law that we claim for ourselves. Economic opportunity, which is an almost bias-free goal, can and should focus on the women and the young. So the messages and the programs will to some extent dictate the audience. The message must be verified by our deeds and our programs.

The question still remains how -- how to engage people who don't trust us; how to take agreed messages to them; and, how to create a meaningful dialog.

The good news is that we have a powerful data bank of experience in exchanges, book translations, libraries in country and other forms of dialog. We have a huge private sector that operates as important and trusted citizens of these countries. But we will have to examine new methods of exchanging ideas and understanding. Our embassies have become fortresses and libraries and information centers are not always user friendly and accessible.

We have no choice but to innovate, to test new models -- to reach millions and to touch them in their countries. It's true, whenever anyone visits the United States as an exchange student, scholar, or teacher, they are transformed. But we will not get enough of these youth here. There are charming, involving, and efficient ways to teach science, computer skills and English on their own TV channels. We have many generous musicians, artists, business people, athletes and teachers who will

go to countries as mentors or speakers. Our own Library of Congress has the largest collection of Arab language books in the world.

It is possible to do a virtual reality “room” or a typical American street and put in a shopping mall in Rabat. It is possible to connect a teenager in America with one in Cairo digitally. It is possible to build messages of dialog and understanding with an interactive component and run them on Arab TV. It is possible to make magazines and how to books between our people and the Muslim people.

To do this bolder, broader canvas you request, we will need a freestanding organization and people of very specific skills. We will need a leader who can stay in place with the power to set the strategic direction centrally and a mandate to harness all the many messages we are sending people through USAID, the Pentagon, State and the BBG as well as other government units which deliver messages and programs. We will need to encourage a climate of innovation. We cannot agree that our acts of generosity through USAID and other avenues, can be made invisible. We also cannot agree to separate the values and beliefs of the American people from our policies, but we can recognize that these are different objectives, audiences and messages that call for different solutions.

Thank you.